SECTION 1.0: OCSE NETWORK AND CSENET 2000 APPLICATION SUITE OVERVIEW

1.0 OCSE NETWORK AND CSENET 2000 APPLICATION SUITE OVERVIEW

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) provide national leadership and direction in planning, managing, and coordinating the automated exchange of interstate case data between child support (IV-D) agencies across the nation. Interstate communications are achieved through two components:

- the Child Support Enforcement Network (CSENet) 2000 Application Suite, and

- the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) Network.

The CSENet Application Suite facilitates and supports automated transmission of interstate child support information. State users electronically initiate and respond to child support enforcement (CSE) case activities in other states for:

- locating noncustodial parents (NCPs);

- establishing paternity and support obligations;

- enforcing support orders and collection of monies; and

- gathering additional case information.

This custom application suite has been designed to receive, validate, transmit, and store standardized transactions between state CSE systems.

The OCSE Network electronically connects the user community. It comprises state-of-the-art technology that transports CSENet standardized data transactions, and other applications, between state systems.

This section presents a brief overview of the network and the application suite, and also highlights the:

- laws impacting the CSE program and state CSE systems;

- benefits of using electronic transfer for interstate case processing; and,

- support that CSENet provides to the Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) automated process.

1.1   Legislative Basis

Child support enforcement requires the coordination and cooperation of multiple organizations at the federal, state, and local levels. Interstate case processing depends on multiple agencies in two or more jurisdictions coordinating activities necessary to locate a noncustodial parent (NCP), establish paternity and support orders, as well as enforce and collect support obligations. Additionally, these agencies must communicate detailed information about the case while remaining cognizant of other states' various policies and procedures.

Previously these administrative and jurisdictional complexities enabled parents to evade support obligations by moving to another state. However, laws were enacted that provide IV-D agencies a legal basis for pursuing NCPs across state boundaries and the opportunity to develop and standardize interstate case processing using automated communication systems.

The following laws played crucial roles in laying the legal foundation for effective interstate case processing:

- Social Security Act (SSA) of 1975;

- Family Support Act (FSA) of 1988;

- Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996; and

- Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA) of 1992 and 1998.

Moreover, they provided the impetus for the creation and development of automated state CSE systems and the CSENet Application Suite on the OCSE Network. The specific contribution of each law to the child support enforcement process is described in more detail in the following sections.

1.1.1   SOCIAL SECURITY ACT AND FAMILY SUPPORT ACT

The CSE program was created in 1975 when Congress enacted Title IV-D of the Social Security Act (SSA) to establish and enforce support obligations owed by the NCP to his or her children. To further stimulate development of CSE programs, automation, and interstate case processing, Congress passed the Family Support Act (FSA) on October 13, 1988.

Among its provisions, the FSA mandated that states develop and implement automated statewide information management systems to enhance case handling and record keeping incident to the collection and paternity determination process. As states began developing and using their systems, the benefits of automation became readily apparent to the user community. Routine tasks that previously required human intervention could be done automatically; as a result more work could be accomplished in a shorter period of time.

The provisions of the FSA also addressed the escalating problem of defaults in support payments by NCPs living out of state. Interstate cases constitute an estimated 30% of a state's child support caseload. To address these problematic and time-consuming cases, a need was identified to develop a communication vehicle to link IV-D agencies and diverse CSE systems across the nation. The purpose of the network was to facilitate the exchange of interstate case information. Thus the FSA's mandates and requirements laid the groundwork for the development of the OCSE interstate telecommunication network and the CSENet Application Suite.

1.1.2 PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND WORK OPPORTUNITY RECONCILIATION ACT

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was enacted on August 21, 1996. The ensuing changes strengthened the ability of the nation's child support enforcement program by:

- requiring states to enact uniform interstate laws;

- providing for state and federal registries of newly hired employees;

- streamlining paternity establishment procedures;

- establishing statewide support collection and distribution methods; and

- initiating tough new penalties, such as license revocation and asset seizure, when support obligations are not met.

Furthermore, both FSA and PRWORA required that states build on existing CSE automation efforts by implementing programmatic enhancements to strengthen child support enforcement and interstate case processing. To meet certification requirements established by OCSE, states were required to exchange interstate case information using the UIFSA-compliant version of the CSENet 2000 Application by October 1, 2000. Additional information on federal certification can be found in Section 4: *Integrating CSENet 2000 in a State CSE System*.

1.1.3 UNIFORM INTERSTATE FAMILY SUPPORT ACT

For over four decades, the Uniform Reciprocal Enforcement Support Act (URESA) was the principal legislation that addressed the resolution of interstate child support cases. The provisions of URESA required that states enact legislation in order to reciprocate in the enforcement of support duties. However, state laws (and their subsequent interpretation), CSE policy, procedures, and forms varied greatly between states. Thus, interstate support enforcement was cumbersome and inefficient.

Child support enforcement officials across the nation recognized the extensive variation between state IV-D agencies' interstate case processing. Consequently, members of the CSE

community identified the need for increased standardization of interstate case data and processing. At the same time they also sought increased flexibility and an efficient means of communicating interstate child support enforcement information.

The Uniform Interstate Family Support Act (UIFSA), promulgated in 1992 and implemented by most states by January 1, 1998, addressed these issues. The provisions of UIFSA set forth uniform rules, procedures, and forms for interstate cases. Moreover, they provide a mechanism for establishing and enforcing support obligations when the obligor lives in one state and the obligee and child live in another. As part of the legislation, states may have received funding to modify their CSE systems to incorporate the CSENet Application Suite.

1.2 OCSE Network and CSENet 2000 Application Background

Historically, exchanging child support case information with another state required manual completion of URESA forms and mailing the documents to the other state. In response to an ever-increasing interstate caseload, complex paperwork requirements, and landmark legislative acts (FSA and PRWORA), OCSE implemented CSENet in 1992.

The CSENet concept was originally envisioned as an end-to-end CSE information network linking automated CSE systems encompassing state and local CSE offices, court systems, local offices, central registries, and federal agencies. When ACF developed CSENet's overall design, there was the assumption that all states would eventually establish their own comprehensive, automated child-support system, corresponding with the state certification requirements set forth by ACF.

Within this model, there were four general design features that the CSENet system should perform:

1. Process routine transactions between the states corresponding with the standard automated functions performed in each state.

2. Process transactions using a standardized software application available to each state.

3. Establish a national transaction server to route transactions between states.

4. Use a standardized communications network to perform all communication functions.

Once state CSE systems were integrated with CSENet, the flow of case information among the states would be automatic, thus providing easy and efficient communication of case information.

Between 1992 and 1998, the CSENet system components, hardware, network, and commercial off-the-shelf software remained relatively unchanged. In the early part of 1999, design of OCSE's new frame-relay network was initiated. By September 15, 1999, enhancements to custom application software (e.g., upgrading URESA Version 2 to UIFSA Version 3 and inclusion of the Valid Transactions Table that standardized usage of

transactions on the network) were implemented. (See Appendix B for the Valid Transactions Table.)

1.3 Overview of the OCSE Network: Architecture and Application Suite

The OCSE Network uses state-of-the-art hardware, software, and communication components that offer increased performance and flexibility to states. The CSENet Application Suite, which resides on the network, facilitates and supports states' automation and transmission of interstate child support information.

1.3.1 NETWORK ARCHITECTURE

Child support information is communicated over a frame-relay network using standardized transactions that are contained in a file on the state's CSE system. The file is picked up daily by the OCSE server and forwarded to another state's CSE system. The network is designed to provide availability, reliability, and security for all 50 states, three territories (Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, and Guam), and the District of Columbia. Essentially, the network design:

- provides availability to all CSE jurisdictions;

- supplies continuous, uninterruptible communications between jurisdictions;

- accommodates additional applications to meet states' future business needs; and

- incorporates stringent security measures to transport child support agencies' sensitive data.

Figure 1-1 illustrates key components of the OCSE Network.

Figure 1-1: OCSE Network Components
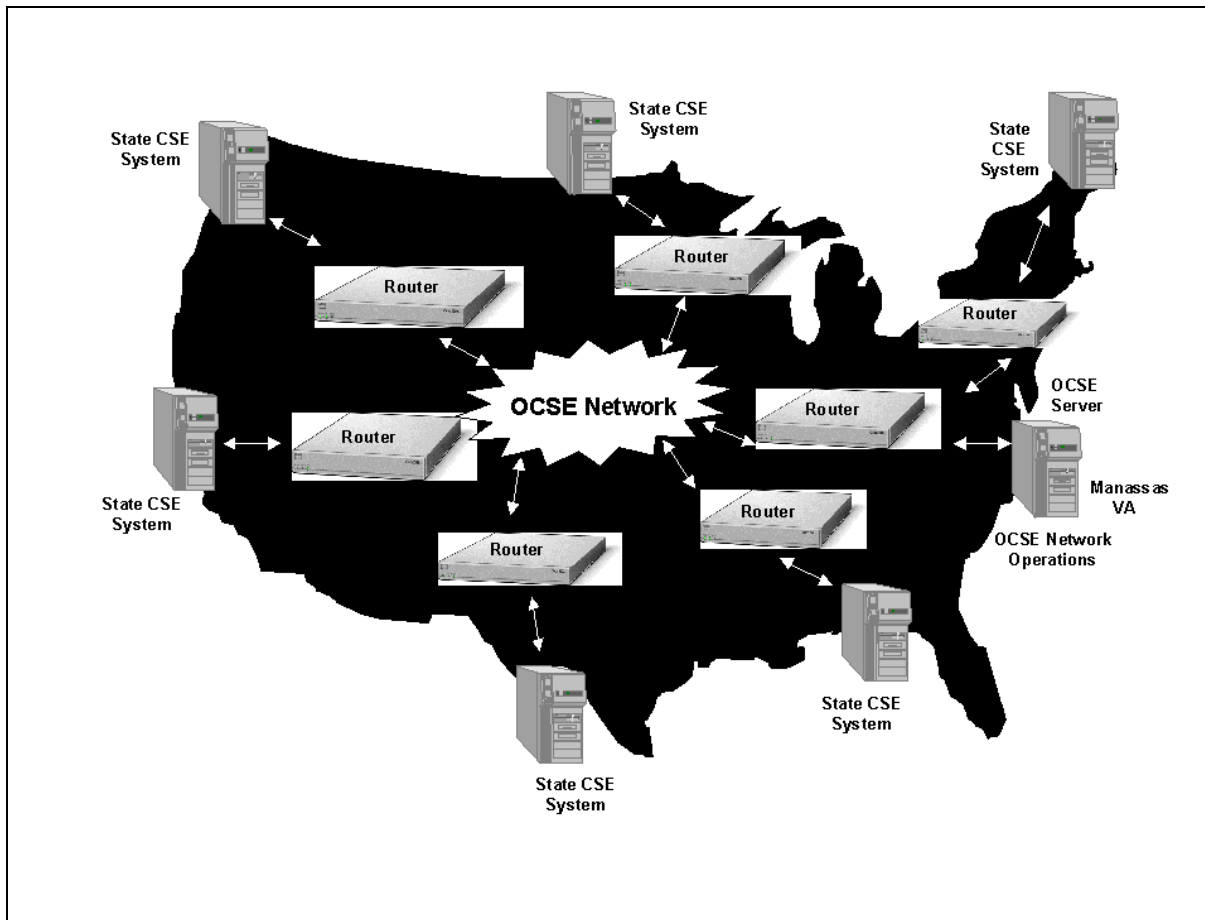
Manassas, Virginia is the primary processing site for all applications that reside on the network. Baltimore, Maryland is the disaster recovery or backup site for the network. If the Manassas site is temporarily unavailable, the Baltimore server assumes operational responsibility and provides continuous communications between states for interstate case processing. A detailed description of the network is presented in Section 2.0: *OCSE Network Architecture.*

1.3.2 CSENET 2000 APPLICATION SUITE

The CSENet 2000 Application Suite enables the user community to electronically transfer child support information between state CSE systems via the OCSE Network. Data exchange is accomplished through use of standardized transactions that provide a common basis for processing interstate case activities. Figure 1-2 illustrates the transaction exchange process.

Figure 1-2: Transaction Exchange Process via the OCSE Network
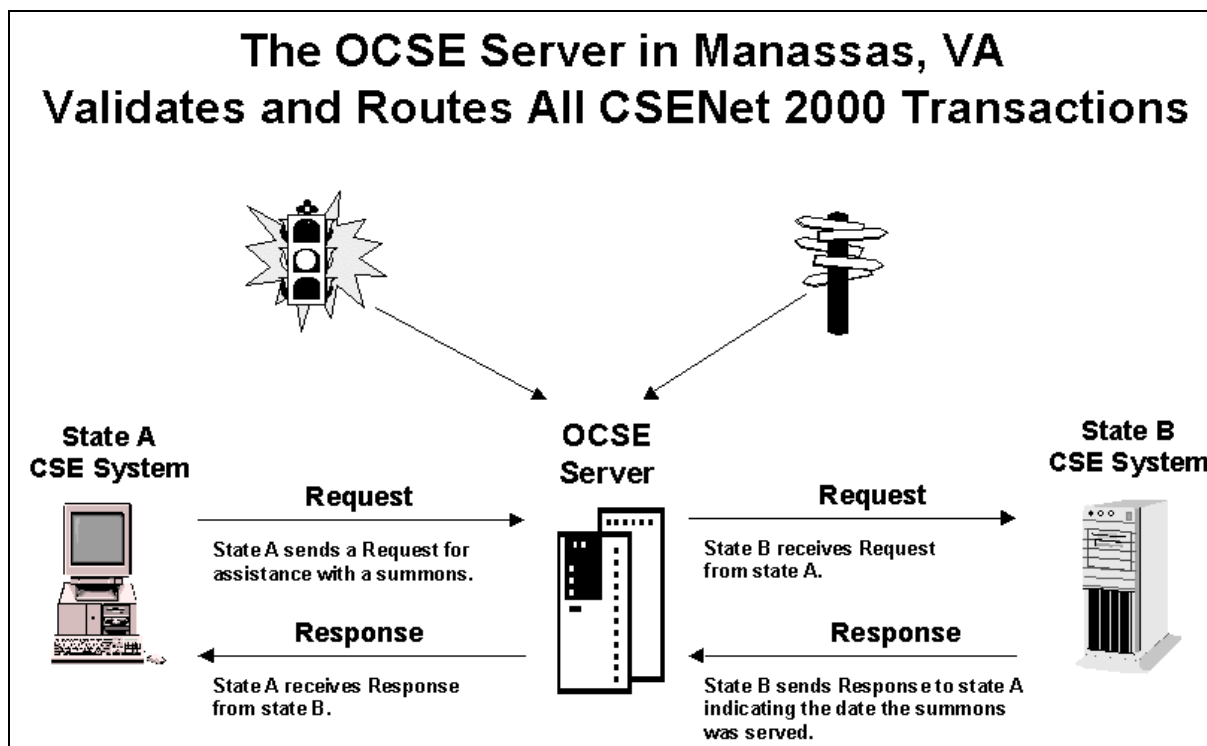
The CSENet Application Suite comprises custom-developed software and commercial off-the-shelf products. It was specifically tailored to provide the CSENet user community with a number of capabilities for processing child support data, communicating with state systems, and improving data reliability. The software providing these capabilities is illustrated in Figure 1-3.

Figure 1-3: The CSENet 2000 Application Suite
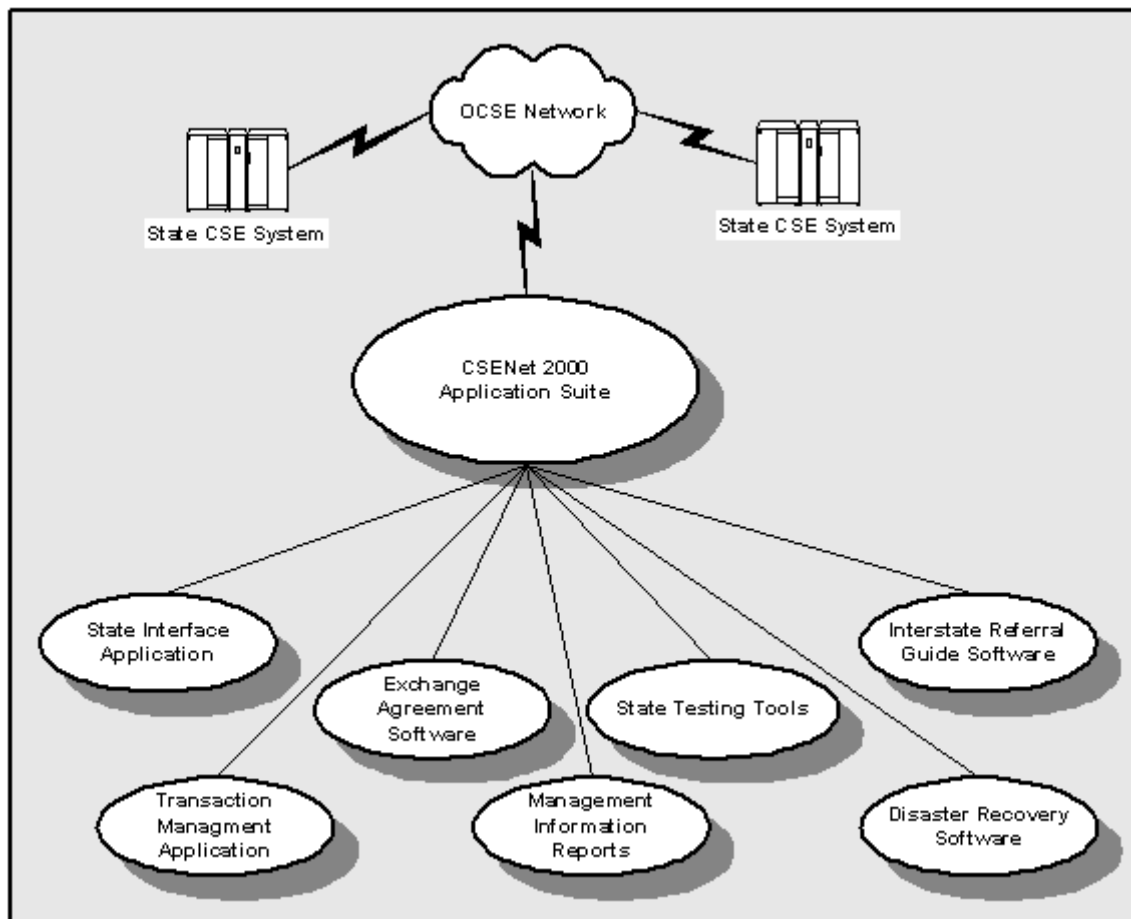
The application suite provides the following capabilities for the CSE user community.

- **State Interface Application** – enables the application suite to interface with state CSE systems.

- **Exchange Agreement Software** – provides states the ability to select specific Function codes and states with which to exchange case information.

- **State Testing Tools** – provides states the opportunity to test programming.

- **Interstate Roster and Referral Guide (IRG) Software** – provides states semi-monthly Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) codes files from the IRG Web Site.

- **Transaction Management Application** – validates states' transactions and provides Validation and Error Reports to users.

- **Management Information (M/I) Reports** – provides data primarily for ad hoc reporting.

- **Disaster Recovery Software** – provides a backup to the operational production system during critical system outages.

For further information, refer to Section 3.0: *CSENet 2000 Application Suite,* for an in-depth description of the transaction exchange process and the capabilities identified above.

1.3.3 BENEFITS OF USING THE OCSE NETWORK AND THE CSENET 2000 APPLICATION SUITE

The objective of the network and application suite is to enhance states' ability to manage and process interstate child support cases by providing a cost-effective and efficient communication network that is flexible, yet powerful enough to accommodate changes in functions, service, and state caseloads.

The OCSE Network uses current technology and provides the following features/benefits to the states:

- **Adaptability** – adapts to users' changing traffic patterns, additional business requirements, new business practices, and other changes.

- **Affordability** – decreases cost when compared to previous networks.

- **Availability** – provides the user community with exceptional uptime because of the disaster recovery site.

- **Scalability** – expands as states' business needs increase.

- **Security** – ensures that OCSE and states have the ability to conduct business without interference from intruders inappropriately accessing or damaging equipment, sensitive data, or operations.

- **Usability** – accommodates an interface for any state configuration. States need to supply a minimal amount of information (e.g., IP address, userid, password and data set name) in order to exchange interstate case information.

The CSENet 2000 suite's greatest assets lie in its inherent improvement of interstate case processing in that it:

- standardizes transactions;

- reduces interstate case-processing time;

- improves the quality of case information sent to another state by providing data integrity checks to ensure that the information transmitted is complete;

- allows states to obtain case, participant, and order information based on matches received from the Federal Case Registry (FCR); and,

- increases interstate collections.

The application significantly simplifies and standardizes interstate child support enforcement processing and provides a network capable of supporting states' current and future telecommunications needs.

1.4   Relationship Between the CSENet 2000 Application Suite and the Federal Parent Locator Service

The Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS) is a national automated system that provides tools and services that facilitate resolution of some of the problems caused by interstate movement of custodial parties (CPs) and noncustodial parents (NCPs). By identifying information on persons involved in interstate CSE cases, the FPLS tools and services increases states' ability to establish paternity, establish or modify support obligations, and enforce support orders. This section briefly describes the FPLS and the support that CSENet provides to OCSE's automated systems.

Figure 1-4 depicts the relationship between the FPLS components, the OCSE Network, and the CSENet 2000 Application Suite.

Figure 1-4: The FPLS and the OCSE Network/CSENet 2000 Application Suite
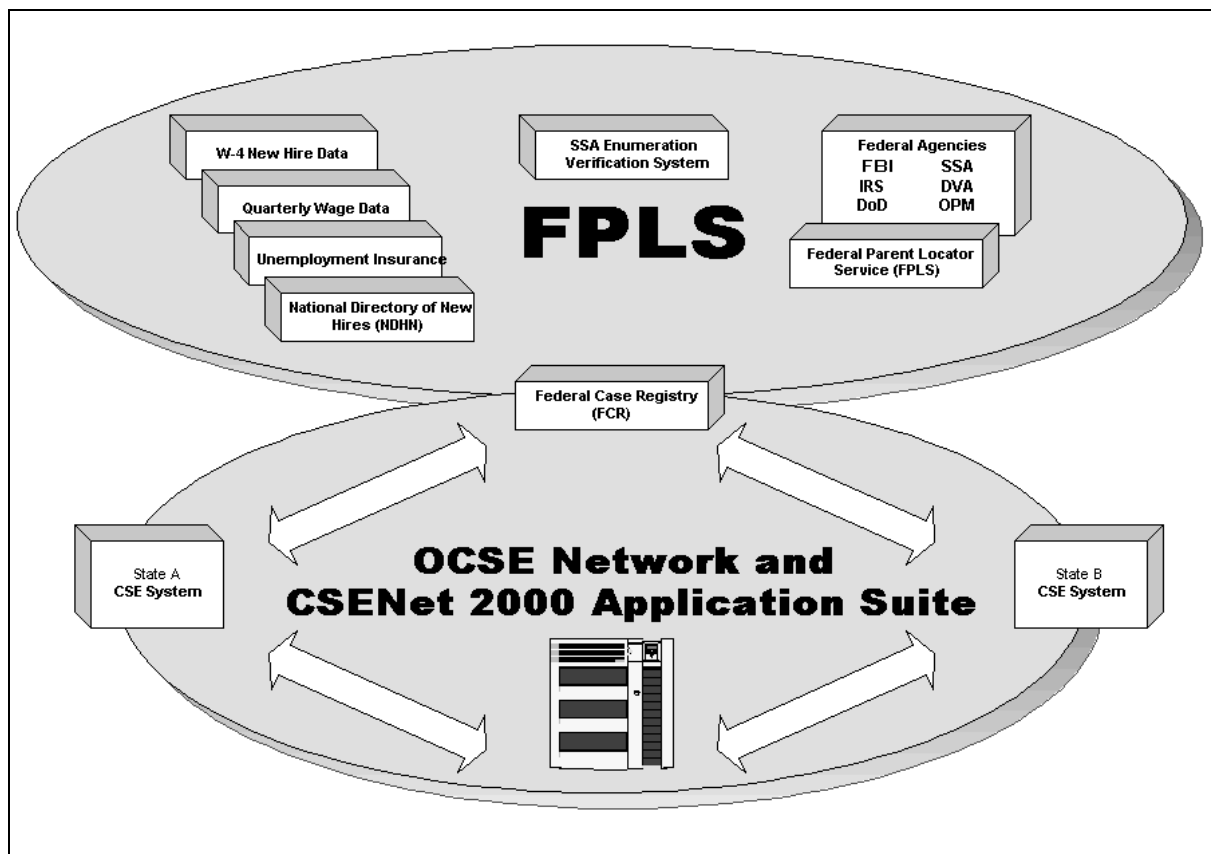
The FPLS consists of the following major components:

1. **The Federal Case Registry (FCR)** is a national registry for IV-D cases and Non-IV-D orders (those established or modified on or after October 1, 1998) that contain data critical for effective child support enforcement. The FCR retains information provided by the State Case Registries (SCRs).

2. **The National Directory of New Hires (NDNH)** is used to proactively provide a state with employment information from state and federal agencies, and Unemployment Insurance (UI) information for an individual who is involved in a IV-D case.

3. **The Federal Parent Locator Service (FPLS)** is a search mechanism that facilitates discerning the location of individuals by interfacing with selected federal agencies.

The FCR provides states with an informational snapshot of data residing on the FCR regarding specific participants, cases, orders, employment information (only for participants in IV-D cases) and other states that are interested in the same participants, cases, or orders. To realize the benefits of FCR data, states should use CSENet for additional communication that pertains to the FCR case or locate data.

The CSENet Case Status Information (CSI) transaction allows states to automate communication following the receipt of FCR data. The CSI transaction is described in greater detail in Section 6.0: *Transaction Functional and Business Usage*. Based on the FCR information received, states can use the network to take immediate interstate action or to follow-up with other states. This allows a full exchange of information on specific cases to determine the next case processing activity. The CSI transaction is also used by states to conduct interstate case reconciliation (ICR), known as ICR-CSI.